

CHAPTER X

GOVERNMENT IN MODERN NUPE

OFTEN in the foregoing description I have used the present tense as if the Nupe kingdom of pre-British days still existed. True, this was to a large extent an historical chapter; yet it described a development the results of which are still valid and still mould society to-day as they moulded it thirty, fifty, or even a hundred years ago. I was not merely reconstructing dead events and past phases. The Nupe kingdom and its society still exist, not only very vividly in the memory of the people but to a very large extent in concrete reality. This is not denying the force of social changes, but stressing the tenacity of a social structure that survives although its contents have changed materially. The recent economic and political changes have affected fundamentally the 'contents' of the social life of the country, the main interests and incentives round which it revolved. There are no more wars, raids, and conquests; slaves and feudal fiefs exist no longer. But ranks and titles and state offices linked with ranks and titles, still exist. Slaves have turned into *bars* or Native Administration officials; fiefs into administrative districts in the charge of royal princes. That the framework of the political organization could survive almost unchanged is in large measure due to the Administration of Nigeria under Indirect Rule and its tendency to utilize as far as possible the traditional social system. But a stronger proof of the tenacity of the Nupe social system is the fact that where the Administration had departed from it and tried to make way for a new development the old trend broke through, undeflected.

Two years ago the Administration built a new official residence for the *Etsu* Bida, with a brick wall, an imposing tower, a garage, and a flower garden—an emblem of modern Nigeria. Incidentally, for all its modernity the new house is but a replica of the hereditary palace of the Nupe kings, with special *katambi* for the *ena Ndeji* and *ena Maiyaki*, for *gitsidi* and *bars*, the *ena masdi*, the men of the *Etsu Dogari*, and the commoners who come to wait on the *Etsu*. Now, this new house was built on 'neutral' ground, outside the town gates, as a symbol of the Government's intention to break with the division into three royal houses, which the Government considered harmful to the unity of the country.¹ The Administration believed itself to have overcome successfully the opposition of the late *Etsu*. An old and sick man, he was reported to have said—and his words were all over Bida—that he had agreed to the new site only because he knew he would not have to live in the new house. Which was true enough—he died before the building was finished. But the new *Etsu*, who willingly took up his residence in the splendid new house, one day surprised the District Officer by demanding that his 'proper house' in Bida, in his 'own' part of the town, should be put in repair at the expense of the Native

¹ See p. 93.

PLATE I-J.

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FIG. 1. LANDING-PLACE AT OGBIA, ONE OF THE LEDU VILLAGES.



FIG. 2. THE "CHAIN OF THRONES."

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941
532
291



FIG. 3. THE SACRED BRONZE FIGURES AT OGBIA.



FIG. 4. VILLAGE CHIEF WITH *aku* TIGER.

THE KING'S HANGMEN IN CENTRAL NIGERIA.

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